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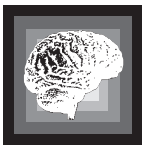

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Therapeutic Fascism: re-educating Communists in Nazi-occupied Serbia, 1942–44

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Abstract

This article probes the relationship between psychoanalysis and right-wing authoritarianism, and analyses a unique psychotherapeutic institution established by Serbia's World War II collaborationist regime. The extraordinary Institute for compulsory re-education of high-school and university students affiliated with the Communist resistance movement emerged in the context of a brutal civil war and violent retaliations against Communist activists, but its openly psychoanalytic orientation was even more astonishing. In order to stem the rapid spread of Communism, the collaborationist state, led by its most extreme fascistic elements, officially embraced psychotherapy, the 'talking cure' and Freudianism, and conjured up its own theory of mental pathology and trauma – one that directly contradicted the Nazi concepts of society and the individual. In the course of the experiment, Serbia's collaborationists moved away from the hitherto prevailing organicist, biomedical model of mental illness, and critiqued traditional psychiatry's therapeutic pessimism.

Keywords

Collaboration, Communism, National Socialism, psychoanalysis, 20th century

Introduction

In occupied Serbia in 1942, Dimitrije Ljotic, a leading collaborationist politician and founder of the inter-war pro-fascistic political organization Yugoslav Nationalist Movement (Union – Zbor), proposed trying to 'save the youth from the occupiers' hands' by creating a unique anti-Communist prison-school, the Institute for compulsory re-education of young Communists (quoted in Kuburovic, 1955). Founded on the idea of Freudian psychotherapy, inclusiveness and recovery, and explicitly rejecting the notion that pathology (and, in particular, 'Communist pathology') necessarily had any biological basis, the Institute would treat high-school and university students affiliated with the Communist resistance movement. It took over four months of negotiations for

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Ljotic to secure permission from the German authorities to establish the Institute in the town of Smederevska Palanka in central Serbia, and he was forced to agree to the condition they would closely monitor its activities, programmes and publications (Kuburovic, 1955).

In this article, I explore the singularities of the Yugoslav case in which an extreme right-wing, collaborationist regime under the leadership of the Serbian war-time prime minister Milan Nedic and his close associate Ljotic, founded, developed, and continued to fund a radically new conception of psychiatry and its social role. This psychiatry, which was focused on the effects of the nation's wartime trauma on its citizenry, proposed that national defeat and humiliation had consequences for the psychological states of individuals, and held that even the most severe of mental pathologies could be rooted in this trauma. The collaborationist state led by its most extreme fascistic elements rejected the rigid determinism of biological psychiatry and instead officially embraced psychotherapy, the 'talking cure', and a version of Freudianism in order to deal with the problem of a disaffected population and the spread of Communism.

The extraordinary and even revolutionary nature of this project cannot be overstated. Virtually any psychiatric diagnosis made in Yugoslavia in the late 1930s and early 1940s implied a constitutional predilection and biological degeneration. The state-sponsored Institute, by contrast, cast mental illness in exclusively psychogenic and psychotherapeutic terms. The idea of re-education was at odds with the formerly prevailing organicist framework. The mission of the Institute was defined in decidedly behaviourist terms, with its leaders seeing Communism as a straightforward manifestation of mental illness and pathology, not degenerative but fully curable under the favourable circumstances of proper education and psychological therapy. Serbian Fascists thus started to define the human psyche as entirely formed by environmental factors and influences. They held that the reality of external psychological trauma was central to the formation of the basic character traits and that, at least in the period of adolescence, mental illness could be successfully treated solely through a combination of proper political enlightenment, psychological manipulation and psychotherapy. In other words, the psychodynamic and psychoanalytic approaches became central to the fascistic project of the wartime Serbian government; but these wartime developments within Serbian and Yugoslav psychiatry and psychoanalysis had broader and more long-lasting consequences, which were felt well after the end of World War II: the model of dynamic psychiatry formulated by the collaborating regime affected the development of post-war socialist psychiatry in Yugoslavia to a significant extent, and it was this bizarre continuity that made the Institute much more than an isolated (and ultimately failed) experiment in political re-education.

This embrace of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy by a group of people ideologically close to Fascism and National Socialism was not unprecedented. In his study of the professionalization of psychotherapy in the Third Reich, Geoffrey Cocks revealed that psychoanalysis and psychotherapy were not proscribed under the Nazi regime; in fact, they grew to acquire a significant position within the state, under the protection of Matthias Heinrich Göring at the Göring Institute in Berlin. Purged of its Jewish practitioners and physicians, the Göring Institute and its philosophy and treatment of mental illness provided a useful 'alternative to the politics of imprisonment, castration and extermination carried out by psychiatrists, the SS, and the military' (Cocks, 1985: 300). In other words, even in the Third Reich, the rigid approach of traditional psychiatry – focused on heredity, degeneration, incarceration and eventually execution – had its limitations, and certainly left very few options open once mental illness was diagnosed, especially in those patients considered, or expected, to be 'racially sound'. On the other hand, German psychoanalysts proposed that certain disorders should be seen, and treated, as being caused by environmental factors and therefore 'curable', and this proved to be rather welcome when it was applied to the community of *Volksgenossen.* As Cocks (1985: 296) argues in his discussion of the cases of SS officers suspected to

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have homosexual proclivities, it was 'ideologically … tempting to try and demonstrate that such individuals were not "real" homosexuals' or degenerate psychopaths 'in the racial and biological sense', and that their 'deviations' and breakdowns could sometimes be explained in a more flexible medical framework.

The fate of psychoanalysis under National Socialism has remained a subject of rich and complicated scholarly debates. While historians have largely abandoned the original thesis that psychoanalysis had completely disappeared under the conditions of the Third Reich, historical interpretations of the complex and conflicted position of psychoanalytic (and psychotherapeutic) ideas and practitioners under Nazism still vary. In the 1980s, influential studies appeared demonstrating how elements of psychoanalysis were integrated in Nazi institutions and professional practices, and that, far from disappearing, psychoanalysis even received a significant degree of official protection in Hitler's Germany (Cocks, 1985; Geuter, 1984; Lockot, 1985). The authors of these accounts became part of a broader movement within the historiography of the Third Reich, which primarily focused on societal, cultural and political continuities rather than ruptures across the years of 1933 and 1945. But their conclusions, surprising and revolutionary when they first appeared, turned out to be quite moderate in comparison with those of a group of scholars such as Laurence Rickels, Dusan Bjelic and others who, in recent years, went much further. They argued that psychoanalysis lent itself rather easily and naturally to authoritarian, totalitarian and discriminatory ideologies because of a deeper affinity it shared with these systems (Bjelic, 2011; Rickels, 2002). For Rickels, Nazism was characterized by a specific 'psychoanalytic sensibility', while Bjelic discussed the potentials of psychoanalysis to become a tool for justifying colonialism and cultural/racial discrimination.

On the other hand, Eileen and James Goggin, for instance, questioned the nature of the psychoanalysis which survived the Nazi onslaught; they proposed that its values and tenets had been so thoroughly destroyed by the conditions of the Nazi regime that, even though psychoanalytic institutions carried on in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, this episode constituted a clear discontinuity in the course of the history of the discipline (Goggin and Goggin, 2001). In the Goggins' argument that the fundamental values of psychoanalysis could not have possibly survived in mid-century Germany, psychoanalysis is viewed as a system of firm, static and straightforward ideals, and this raises the question of the possibility of assessing the 'authenticity' of psychoanalytic endeavours. In response to this attempt to search for a 'true' psychoanalysis, Cocks (2002) emphasized the importance of contextualization, and argued that various 'authentic', undistorted elements of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy continued to exist under the Nazi regime's protection, having been successfully integrated in a number of strands of the regime's ideology and practice – because 'Freud's science was simply too important for even the Nazis to discard entirely' (Cocks, 2002). Moreover, the development of psychoanalysis in the period 1933–45 demonstrated some very significant continuities with both the previous and the subsequent periods, and became rather important in the course of the professionalization of German mental sciences. Finally, the numerous and complicated debates, transformations and disagreements within the field of psychoanalysis itself make it difficult to define absolute truths and distortions in this context. In this article I propose to understand psychoanalysis as a complex, fluid system of theories and practices, which was embedded in and shaped by a number of cultural, political and social historical contexts. The collaboration and compromises between psychoanalysis and Nazism demonstrated the significant degree of flexibility and adaptability of both the profession and the regime, and these tendencies need to be integrated in their respective historiographies. For students of psychoanalysis, its fascinating malleability and its ability to get re-defined and re-adapted in a number of different ways and contexts hold supreme importance for understanding the history of its extraordinary development in the twentieth century.

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In recent years, scholars of psychoanalysis have started broaching the broader question of the discipline's frequent success and flourishing under different kinds of authoritarian regimes in a number of different societies. The book *Psychoanalysis and Politics: Histories of Psychoanalysis under Conditions of Restricted Political Freedoms* (Danousi and Plotkin, 2012) investigated how the 'psychoanalytic culture' developed in the climate of authoritarianism, and emphasized the willingness of a number of individual psychoanalysts to adapt to Italian Fascism, the Vichy regime or Franco's government. In *Freud in the Pampas*, Plotkin (2001) also offered a convincing analysis of how psychoanalysis grew in importance in Argentina, especially during the Peron dictatorship. The present article adds to this growing literature, not merely by exploring the accommodation, toleration and co-existence, but also by highlighting the very central role that psychoanalysis had in the thinking of the Serbian collaborationist regime: the Serbian Institute was not merely condoned or tolerated but actually established by the collaborating authorities, and co-opted to create a therapeutic alliance with the regime's foremost wartime enemy. This circumstance set it apart from similar institutions such as the Göring Institute, and made it a unique experiment in the entire occupied Europe.

In the course of the twentieth century, a number of authoritarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe set up elaborate experiments in political re-education, mostly of young people and political dissidents. These experimental re-educational camps were infamous for their brutality and the deep psychological damage they inflicted on their inmates, and it was their excessive reliance on and adaptation of psychological, psychoanalytic and psychiatric strategies and theories that distinguished them. In some of the largest and most significant re-education camps for political prisoners, such as Romania's Pitesti and Aiud prisons, and Yugoslavia's Goli Otok and Institute for compulsory re-education of Communists, the East European Communist and fascistic governments systematically employed psychoanalytic, psychological and psychiatric ideas and practices for their own purposes, often co-opting high-ranking mental health professionals. In the process, they affected the broader course of the development of mental health sciences – and psychoanalysis in particular – in the region. The close connection between political re-education and psychoanalysis/psychiatry here has often been commented upon (Bacu, 1971; Ierunca, 1990; Kostic, 2002; Markovski, 1984; Merisca, 1997; Muresan, 2008; Perucica, 1990; Savicevic, 1998), but has never become a subject of systematic historical analyses. My article is the first attempt to tackle the complex and tense relationship between psychoanalysis and authoritarian political re-education in the region, and to explore how this collaboration influenced the nature and development of post-war psychiatry and psychoanalysis in this part of Europe.

There exists no English language literature on the Institute, and so far no systematic research has been done on the history of psychiatry (or of professional life in general) in Yugoslavia, or in the Balkans. This article will thus be addressing this significant gap in historical scholarship.[1] In the context of Yugoslav socialist historiography, the treatment of the project remained true to the terms set by the characterization of the Institute in 1945 in the state indictment of its principal and chief ideologue, Milovan Popovic. The post-war Yugoslav Commission for Ascertaining the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Helpers (*Komisija za utvrdjivanje zlocina okupatora i njegovih pomagaca*) described the Institute as a mere instrument of the Gestapo and the collaborationist Belgrade Special Police, a concentration camp whose chief aim was to eliminate, demoralize and intimidate the 'freedom-loving youth' of Yugoslavia. The indictment further ascertained that Popovic and his entourage systematically implemented a 'terrorist regime' and devised and applied the most abusive police techniques of psychological terror, physical cruelty and torture by hunger and physical exhaustion.[2] Yugoslav historians did not subsequently introduce any significant new perspectives or contribute novel interpretations. When they addressed the issue of the Institute in Smederevska Palanka at all, they emphasized the harsh measures, beatings and punishments, as

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well as the Institute's collaboration with the Special Police and Gestapo, which sent to Smederevska Palanka those young Communist-affiliated inmates of the Gestapo prisons and the Banjica concentration camp considered to be 'lighter' offenders and consequently 'corrigible' in ideological terms. The emphasis was on the police terror, threats and imprisonment, while the Institute's educational efforts were regularly termed malevolent fascistic propaganda and were thus never thoroughly analysed (Borkovic, 1966: 97–8; Stefanovic, 1984).

One of Yugoslavia's foremost researchers of World War II collaboration, Milan Borkovic, noted the deficiencies of his analytical framework, and its limited ability to account for the behaviour of certain inmates and their families. At the end of his article dedicated to the Institute's character and functioning, Borkovic (1966) expressed his indignation at some of his own archival findings, and was clearly at a loss to explain them: several parents' voluntary requests to have their children admitted to the Institute, and a petition by a group of 44 inmates whose sentences had expired to have their stay in Palanka extended until 'better times' arrived. For Borkovic, this was incomprehensible: given that the Institute was yet another fascistic concentration camp, a ploy of the collaborationists to further the physical and mental torture of the leftist youth in occupied Serbia, it was indeed unbelievable that anyone would want, of their own free will, to send their child to such a place, in which 'the youth could encounter death so to speak at every step'. Borkovic (1966: 114–15) concluded that such petitions indeed 'invited further thought', but he never made a move to try to re-define his rather one-dimensional interpretation of the Institute and its aims.

More recently, Nikolova (2010) discussed the Institute as a segment of Serbia's wartime educational system – based on obedience, strict discipline and physical punishments – and used a variety of sources to argue against the thesis that it was a concentration camp, although she did not analyse any psychoanalytic or psychiatric aspects of this 're-education' project.

I will argue that the circumstances of the Institute's foundation and the system of ideas on which it rested were significantly more complex than previously acknowledged. Although quickly resorting to brutal punishments and a regime based on threats and fear, the Institute's leadership and ideologues developed a complicated and quite revolutionary theory of mental illness and therapy, and attempted to implement a comprehensive programme of ideological and political re-education along pro-fascistic lines. This programme and the entire re-educational mission were not a mere rhetorical trick, a propagandistic ploy to conceal Ljotic's followers' psychological torture of the Communist youth. Rather, the Institute's programme, theoretical framework and ideological postulates should be analysed in their own right, as they could be very telling of the nature and evolution of the collaborationist regime in Serbia, as well as of a host of new ideas regarding the nature and sources of mental illness and forms of therapy. On the other hand, it is worth bearing in mind that, although the Institute's ideologues espoused a more liberal version of psychiatry, this was still a co-option of the profession for extremist collaborationist goals, and that the prospect of the death penalty loomed large over this supposedly Freudian experiment. While the Institute proposed using less brutal and punitive psychiatric methods, there was nothing admirable about its ultimate political and ideological goals, given that its main effort was to make Nazi supporters out of the imprisoned Communist youth.

Historical context

After the German invasion of April 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was quickly defeated and dismembered, while different regimes of occupation were established in the various parts of the country. Serbia found itself in an extremely difficult situation: it had to endure four years of a highly brutal German military occupation, and large chunks of territory were severed from it and attached to the neighbouring states. The entire occupation period was marked by the Wehrmacht's

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bloody retaliation operations against civilians. The country's Jewish population was almost completely exterminated by May 1942. Serbia's wartime government, led by the conservative military general Nedic, had rather limited authority and little independence in political decision-making, although it recruited and organized its own police forces – the Serbian State Guard, which functioned under the German command and regularly took part in anti-civilian violence. Moreover, the emergence, consistent growth and political and military successes of the Communist resistance movement, led by Tito's Communist Party of Yugoslavia, further complicated the position and activities of Serbia's collaborationist forces.

The Institute at Smederevska Palanka was in operation between September 1942 and the autumn of 1944, and over 1200 inmates, male and female, went through its premises during those two years. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and its Minister, Velibor Jonic, it was staffed almost exclusively by members of Ljotic's Zbor who became teachers and pedagogues, while nominally Nedic's Serbian State Guard provided security. Its principal, Milovan Popovic, was a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Humanities of Belgrade University, with an interest in psychology, and he worked with a number of psychologists from the university to define the Institute's mission and develop its activities, programmes and lectures. However, Popovic's main credential for the post of headmaster was his pre-war stint as the president of the Anti-Communist League in Belgrade, a political organization which collaborated closely with the Anti-Communist section of the Belgrade Police. With the onset of the occupation, the staff of this section was recruited to work for the new collaborationist Special Police, supervised by the Gestapo and chiefly concerned with persecuting the regime's political opponents – the Communists (Stefanovic, 1984: 200–221).[3] Popovic's connections with the leading functionaries of the Belgrade Special Police proved crucial several times in the course of the occupation, when the Institute's existence was under threat from the German authorities.[4]

Ljotic was the driving force behind establishing the Institute. From the very beginning of the German occupation in April 1941, he was among the most important of high-ranking Serbian collaborationists. He immediately founded the Serbian Volunteers' Corps (SDK), an armed organization which was integrated into the Wehrmacht and involved in pacification missions throughout the war years. Members of the disbanded Zbor joined the collaborationist cabinet of Milan Nedic in August 1941, while Ljotic himself became a Commissar for the Rebuilding of the City of Smederevo, his home town. Ljotic's actual political influence extended well beyond that suggested by his official title. Extremely well connected in German circles, Ljotic had privileged access to the German military and occupation authorities in Serbia. He nominated Milan Nedic as the collaborationist Prime Minister and, although he never formally joined Nedic's government, he maintained significant influence over its decision-making and plans throughout the war years (Tomasevich, 2001: 186–95).

The Institute was sited at a camp that had first held political prisoners and later prisoners of war, and it was made into a more hospitable complex of buildings and lands with the help of the first group of inmates. As one of them later reminisced, it was with their own hands that the inmates transformed 'the wooden, unfinished barracks [into] … decent bedrooms, muddy streets [into] paths, the barren field filled with weed [into] a sports field, the infertile lands [into] cultivated farms'.[5] Despite these efforts, however, physical conditions at the Institute remained harsh and arduous until the very end, and the food supply consistently dwindled; in addition, in early 1944 the Institute's management decided to establish an internal prison, the Isolation Unit, where the most recalcitrant and undisciplined inmates were kept, beaten and forced to do the hardest manual labour. By then, the Institute began to resemble conventional concentration camps to an alarming extent.

In this truly peculiar experiment, the fascistic, violently anti-Communist collaborationist government took on the challenge of persuading its enemies that Nedic and Ljotic were in fact their

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closest friends and that their Communist affiliation would not necessarily prevent them from becoming Hitler's loyal Serbs. The singularity of this combination of fascistic authoritarianism, Freudianism, behaviourism and psychotherapy becomes particularly clear if one bears in mind that, in other realms, the Serbian collaborationists worked from within a deterministic, organicist biological intellectual framework. Their aim was to revolutionize their society and, when the time was right, make it part of a new Hitlerian European, and world, order. In addition, they were eugenicists in the educational sphere.[6] Further, the Nedic government actively rounded up and detained the local Jewish population, and followed, arrested, tortured and executed thousands of Communist activists and sympathizers, most notoriously in the Belgrade concentration camp Banjica. Nedic's pronouncements on the evils that these Communists brought on the Serbian people implied that they were utterly excluded from the community of the Serbian nation and could not possibly be welcomed back. Nedic called them 'criminal elements', 'Eastern barbarians', 'social scum', 'abjects poisoned with foreign money', 'hordes', carriers of an 'evil thought bred in the satanic Jewish mind' and 'psychopathological monsters'. Those Serbs who joined the Communist movement were regularly referred to as traitors but also as 'degenerate specimens' (Milosavljevic, 2006: 29), who infested their surroundings with viruses of a 'horrible Asiatic disease' (Borkovic, 1979: 121–50).[7] The anti-Communist military struggle was the central goal of the Nedic government and its armed formations, and aggressive anti-Communism constituted a core element of the government's ideological pronouncements. All cabinet changes throughout the occupation years were aimed at making the government more efficient in helping the Germans to eradicate the Communist resistance movement in Serbia (Borkovic, 1979a: 146).

As the occupation and war went on, and the credibility and popular appeal of Ljotic's and Nedic's regime diminished, collaborationists' responses to the Communist resistance developed in unexpected directions. From the very beginning, Ljotic and his ideological companions were obsessed with the supposedly predominantly anti-national, leftist leanings of the Serbian high school and university youth; hence the enormous energies invested until the end of the war in the grand project of 'revolutionizing' the school curricula and staff (Karapandzic, 1958; Krakov, 1963: 251–54; Milosavljevic, 2006: 36–8). But faced with students' boycotts of the new schools and university seminars, and with their own failure to recruit any significant number of young people into the civilian and military organizations of the collaborationist regime, Ljotic and Nedic got involved in this peculiar project which softened the criteria for the 'nationally reliable' youth and moved away from the rigid biological definitions of friends and enemies. Indeed, if all those opposed to the government's activities and *raison d'être* were to be written off as incorrigible degenerates, the leaders and ideologues of 'New Serbia' would probably have been left without a population sufficient to form the new order in the country. To boost their own credentials, as well as to attempt to weaken the support that the Communist Party enjoyed among young people, especially in the urban areas, Ljotic collaborated with Nedic's Ministry of Education to broaden the educational reform plan and found a centre for transforming the youth 'seduced' by left-wing ideas and re-educating them in a nationalist, pro-fascistic spirit.

In a sense, in the context of the historical development of Yugoslav mental sciences, the Serbian collaborationist regime's adoption of psychiatric and psychoanalytic language, theoretical systems and practices for explicitly political purposes was not an entirely illogical choice. Yugoslav psychiatry and psychotherapy had a very long tradition of political involvement before, during and after World War II, and the political ambitions of the psychiatric profession in both Serbia and Yugoslavia remained strong and persistent throughout the twentieth century. In the inter-war years, Serbian psychiatrists diligently offered themselves to the state as devoted and able allies in modernization, Europeanization and moulding the 'mind of the nation' away from its supposed 'primitivism' (although the very therapeutic pessimism of the biomedical model, rejected during the war,

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proved to be an important obstacle to the inter-war pyschiatrists' reformist agendas). In the post-war years as well, Serbian and Yugoslav psychiatrists and psychoanalysts quickly and directly involved themselves in the Communist Party's discussions of the recent socialist revolution and its numerous challenges, diagnosing the 'psychological pathologies' of the revolutionaries, and responding (and offering themselves as a solution) to some of the Party's core concerns in that regard. However, it was during the Nazi occupation and through the functioning of the Institute that the theories and practices of Yugoslav/Serbian psychoanalysis and psychiatry were most directly co-opted and employed by a political regime, and granted the most unequivocally political role in their entire history. This greatly transformed the professions' overall social influence, character and ideology, even though the Institute hardly involved any of the leading psychoanalytic or psychiatric practitioners in Serbia.[8]

Therapeutic Fascism

The catastrophe of the country's dismemberment and Nazi occupation thus gradually spurred the ideological change of heart, which resulted in the re-definition of psychiatry's core assumptions and social mission. The enormous psychological trauma at the national level led to the transformation of the regime's thinking about the origins of mental illness and appropriate therapeutic possibilities. In the collaborationist government's understanding, Serbia's defeat, occupation and humiliation were an opportunity for reform of the Serbian ethnic identity, as well as for national rebirth and rejuvenation. In the same vein, personal psychological traumas were to be considered solely responsible for young people's succumbing to Communist 'pathology'. The Institute was envisioned as the site where this mental/political breakdown was overcome and translated into a healthy patriotic reawakening of the youth. Psychoanalytic insights intertwined with the regime's political purposes, and the right-wing authoritarian government mobilized Freudianism and psychotherapy in order to support and reinforce its own wartime goals. In fact, the ideologues and employees of the Institute adopted Freudian ideas about 'curability' and the environmental, psychological character of mental pathology because, among other reasons, these provided an opportunity for a more constructive and open-ended solution to the problem of the regime's unpopularity and the spread of Communism. Instead of incarcerating and executing all who opposed collaboration, the Institute and its headmaster, Popovic, tried to demonstrate that not all young 'psychopaths' needed to be killed off, and that some could be helped out of their illness. This was indeed important: for the regime whose popular support was meagre, the possibility offered by the psychoanalytic approach that at least some of the very numerous opponents could be 'saved', and 're-educated' to side with Nedic and Ljotic, must have been meaningful.

Freud figured prominently in all spheres of the project of therapeutic fascism. In a letter to Ljotic in November 1942, Popovic attempted to summarize his experiences with the first group of inmates sent from the Gestapo-run Banjica concentration camp to the Institute for 're-education'. He responded to criticisms that the Institute's treatment of Communist activists and sympathizers was overly mild and compassionate. Popovic believed that his educational philosophy was centrally informed by the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. In a statement that revealed his understanding of Freud's take on the concept of transference, Popovic explained:

> … it is necessary to establish between us and them a relationship full of closeness and trust. Freud could only use psychoanalysis to treat the ill if he succeeded to develop in his patients true love, of sexual nature, towards himself. Only then did they open their souls to him and he could see their wounds. We must observe similar rules. The children must first believe in us, that we will defend and protect them like the closest of kin, and only then can they reveal their souls to us.[9]

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Popovic protested against the brutal treatment of young political prisoners at the hands of police before they were sent to the Institute, claiming that such a violent and heartless approach could only exacerbate the ideological delusions of the offenders. He believed that the potential for re-education could only be properly assessed and tapped if the relationship with the inmates was one of love and trust rather than violence. Popovic imagined the pedagogical staff of the Institute in the role of parents and brothers and sisters, 'because at this moment, for our inmates, we represent the Fatherland, history and the Serbian future all together'. He reminded Ljotic that most of the inmates had still remained silent in the face of police beatings and torture, and that therefore the Institute staff would not apply the same measures; 'that ice could be melted solely with the help of enormous love, and we are offering it, destroying ourselves, but already today we can see how they grow from our strength'.[10]

One of the Institute's monthly reports to the Ministry of Education warned that, unless the pedagogues' approach was sensitive and extremely gradual, 'each thoughtless move could ruin months and months of careful dedication, and the inmates could consequently close down and nobody could get anything from them any more'.[11] The language of the report and the warning itself again resembled the psychiatric descriptions of schizophrenic patients, whose 'interiority' – blocked, closed off, unreachable – could occasionally be glimpsed in the course of therapy but then receded, while the patients continued functioning like automatons and defied all the psychiatrists' attempts at communication. The Communists' interiority was equally complex and sensitive, and while mainstream psychiatry proposed very little in terms of alternative strategies for treating inaccessible patients and experimented with psychotherapy only sporadically, Popovic argued that his ostensibly Freudian approach – full of warmth and compassion – had to be applied consistently. Violence, punishment and harshness were likely to result in complete failure and the inability to cure. In fact, Popovic's frequent epistolary discussions with the numerous opponents of his concept of re-education could be read in a psychiatric code, as constituting a critique of the dominant psychiatric hospital treatment of mental patients. Although he never mentioned psychiatry itself, his protest against police brutality and a purely punitive approach to those whom he considered mentally ill offered a conceptual alternative in the sphere of therapy. Popovic criticized the authorities' generally contemptuous treatment of the inmates when outside the Institute, which closely resembled the social milieu's prejudicial attitude towards psychiatric patients at the time. His call to establish a more humane and even egalitarian relationship with the inmates/patients in order to achieve therapeutic success was certainly applicable in the psychiatric hospital setting. Most importantly, Popovic objected to the tendency to write off those considered to be suffering from mental or social (or political-ideological) pathology; many hospital psychiatrists often expressed their frustration with biological psychiatry's propensity to disregard strategies for patients' improvement, and searched for ways to advance the hospital's role beyond the merely custodial or punitive, and to engage more closely with their patients' psychological tribulations. In that sense, the police treatment to which he vehemently objected was similar to the general psychiatric one. Popovic's Institute claimed to create a setting radically different, and in opposition to the then prevailing notions of mental illness and therapy. According to the Institute's Programme, signed by the Minister of Education himself, the saving and healing of the inmates was to be achieved through:

> establishment of a regime as bearable as possible; a friendly attitude of the pedagogues towards the inmates; the establishment of a close individual and group relationship with the inmates for the purpose of earning their trust, getting to know them better, developing positive traits and encouraging independent critical thinking in them.[12]

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The Institute's newspaper *Zavodski List*[13] ran an article which made clear references to the practice and importance of self-analysis for the process of one's 'moral perfection'. The author, inmate Sava Milinkovic, argued that the ability of some people to 'thoroughly examine their own mistakes' was crucial for their development into decent human beings with positive value systems. This self-reflectiveness was the only way to correct one's blunders and delusions, and to emerge from them as a mentally healthy person. It was necessary, according to Milinkovic, constantly to self-analyse and re-think one's ideas, decisions, and behaviour in order to be 'healed'. He also warned that forgetting 'heals the soul from the suffering which it had survived', so that the 'repression of the memory' of mistakes was also recommendable at a certain point in the course of a therapy. In other words, after the initial detailed and thorough analysis of one's mistakes, immediately after they were committed, one should not continue to dwell on them, should not 'tackle them any more in one's consciousness or subconsciousness', because that would lead to feelings of despair and hopelessness.[14] This unexpected insistence on the importance of forgetting – and forgiving – also clearly referred to the situation of the Institute's inmates, and Milinkovic's article conveyed the message that their own 'mistakes' from the past would be forgotten and left undisturbed if only they agreed to undergo the self-analysis in the course of which they would see their past affiliations as wrong.

The inmates were required to write regular self-analytical essays regarding their ideological and political viewpoints, their past behaviour, their current experiences at the Institute, their identity formation, and so on. These essays were meant to be confessions of sorts (the Institute's leadership termed them 'questionnaires' or 'opinion polls'), and were supposed to give the pedagogues and teachers a unique insight into the inmates' mental processes, ethical dilemmas and potential (and hoped for) political transformations. The questionnaires' themes varied: sometimes they merely asked the students to give an opinion about a talk or a guest lecture, and at other times the focus was on the inmates' reflections on their own psychological and intellectual growth while at the Institute: 'What I thought about the Institute before I arrived here', 'Why I am not and I cannot be a Communist', 'Accuracies and fallacies of historical materialism', etc. Most assignments pushed the inmates rather straightforwardly to reveal their political affiliations and their stance on the current political situation: 'What do I think about Tito's actions?', 'Tito, General Mihailovic and Nedic', 'Where I agree and where I disagree with Marxism', 'For St. Sava or for Marx?', 'What I think about the future economic order', 'On capital punishment for children in the Soviet Union', etc. Occasionally, these opinion polls asked more personal questions regarding the inmates' perceptions of their own position within the Institute or their future after the release: 'What I think about the possibility of escape' or 'Why I should be released for Christmas'. These assignments emphasized the importance of introspection for the successful completion of the Institute's goal of re-education: although the essays clearly served the purpose of informing the leadership and teachers of their inmates' innermost thoughts and tensions, they also became a crucial segment of the psychoanalytical approach suggested by Popovic.[15]

The language used to describe the Institute's tasks with regard to the inmates' condition and future was replete with medical terms such as diagnosis, cure, contagion, disease. The result was the elimination of culpability. While giving a speech at one of the Institute's annual celebrations, the Minister of Education even went so far as to say that the inmates themselves could not be blamed for their former political activity, just as regular medical patients bore no responsibility for suffering their illnesses. A team of Belgrade University psychologists visited the Institute in order to test the inmates' intelligence as well as to test them for 'pathological traits, of their character and temperament'.[16] Most importantly, the Institute shied away from the degenerative model of mental illness, and its ideologues and leaders instead argued that mental pathology could develop in highly talented individuals and did not necessarily affect their intellectual – or 'racial' – capacities.

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Therefore, even though it was agreed that Communism was undoubtedly a sign of psychopathology, this did not necessarily damn those diagnosed with it – as it most certainly would have in a more traditional psychiatric setting. Popovic and his associates claimed that the best and most advanced young people in Serbia tended to be seduced by Communism. The biomedical model was thus fully subverted: the 'best material' of the Serbian nation was in danger of being poisoned by the Communist ideology. One of the monthly reports brought an account of the 'special work with the first category', which stated that 'this category was dealt with most thoroughly, because the most serious cases [were] here, but also the broadest and deepest interests'.[17] This approach was obvious in the very structure of the Institute's programme: the inmates were divided into three categories based on their knowledge of Marxism, national history, global politics, and political economy. The first group's members – usually university students and advanced high-school pupils – were considered the most serious political offenders and hence the gravest cases of Communist pathology, and yet the Institute's leadership also clearly saw them as the most talented, intelligent and well-informed – and respectable – of all the inmates. They required separate teaching programmes and more intense, in-depth political re-education work, and only the most highly qualified teachers at the Institute's disposal were assigned to work with the first group. That the Institute's ideologues suggested that severe mental pathology could be coupled with above-average intellectual capacities and exquisite talent was quite revolutionary and was in keeping with the Institute's psychogenic concept of mental illness.

The core therapeutic activity practised at the Institute was educational. In the course of the Institute's ideological seminars, the focus was on refuting the central tenets of Marxism, offering right-wing ideological alternatives to the Communist Party, and emphasizing various failures of the USSR. It was crucial to try to persuade the inmates – the Communist youth – that Communism was not the only ideology of patriotism and social justice, and that Ljotic's vision of New Serbia in a New Europe combined traditional Serbian nationalism, Christianity and, most importantly, a deep awareness of the need for wealth redistribution and for strengthening workers' rights.[18]

Therefore the bulk of the re-educational programme focused on the analysis of Marxist literature; there were independent seminars solely on Bolshevism and Marxism, which discussed 'the most seductive ideas in Communism', or the tactics and strategies of the Communist International. Furthermore, seminar programmes emphasized critiques of the USSR's economic and political system, and dealt with topics such as the bureaucratization of the Soviet revolution, peasant resistance to the collectivization process and consequent economic disturbances, political repression and show-trials, etc. The most talented of the inmates were enrolled in classes which engaged with guided criticisms of Lenin's most important writings. Other classes addressed the basics of sociology, philosophy and national history and literature, while separate meetings were held with all three categories of the inmates to discuss the current political events, developments on the frontlines, partisan actions in Serbia, advances and failures of the Soviet army and resistance. The future of Serbia constituted yet another crucial topic, and one which, according to the Institute's own reports, most intrigued the inmates.[19] Clearly, the teachers and lecturers had to make great efforts to present their students with an optimistic vision of Serbia's role in German-led Europe. The emphasis was more frequently on the future changes of the internal socio-economic order – a stronger welfare state, social justice – than on the issue of foreign relations and connections with the Third Reich.[20]

According to the post-war testimonies of former inmates, the Institute's leadership used individual therapy sessions to attempt to forge a closer bond with the incoming internees, to present themselves as parental figures deeply concerned about the inmates' well-being, and also to find out first-hand about the depth and solidity of their ideological affiliations. In these testimonies, the former internees argued that the Institute's approach was to 'deftly combine pressure with offering

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the possibility of a better, more carefree life' if they were willing to cooperate.[21] In that sense, the individual meetings always integrated attempts at manipulation with more traditional psychotherapeutic techniques. These manipulative tendencies were also openly discussed in Popovic's own writings, where he admitted that the application of various techniques for 'breaking' the inmates' will must not be obvious to them, and warned the teachers and pedagogues to mould the inmates' attitudes as imperceptibly as possible.[22] The Institute's leadership insisted on honesty: they required the internees to reveal all about their 'cases' and backgrounds, and to admit their past errors, assuring them that they would suffer no consequences. Interrogations and confessions were thus the main purpose of the therapeutic sessions, and the parallel with the Gestapo and the Belgrade Special Police goals and methods did not escape the inmates. On the other hand, 'the Institute leadership … promised that the police would not find out, that their position would not change after the confession, instead it would improve, because their honesty would be appreciated'.[23] Furthermore, according to some of the post-war testimonies, Popovic and the other teachers often looked for weaknesses and fears, and then played on them. The Institute staff obtained the inmates' police dossiers and investigation records, and thus found out who were the ones willing to talk or likely to be broken more easily and who had already revealed information about the Party's illegal work, plans and other comrades, and then exerted additional pressure on them.[24]

In the opinion of some of the former inmates, the Institute's leadership devised a new definition of mental health and psychological normality, according to which egoism, the lack of overarching ethical principles, tendency to theft, and selfishness constituted the essential markers of healing and political rehabilitation. This new vision of a healthy young person was formulated in response and in opposition to the Party's guidelines concerning the personal and ethical characteristics of a good Communist, the foremost among which were solidarity and camaraderie. The former inmates testified that if a person was caught in the act of theft, he or she would be approached by the leadership and considered re-educated, because stealing went directly against the Communist principles. By behaving in such a selfish manner, unconcerned with the well-being and interests of the other comrades, the inmate in question would manifest his or her final disassociation from the Communist ideals. In relation to this new definition of psychological normality, the political-ideological classes at the Institute stressed Machiavelli's *The Prince* and promoted a particular interpretation of its central ideas, especially the notion that ethical or ideological principles necessarily played a negligible role in the conduct of politics, and that therefore the absence of firm moral convictions was the rule, a signifier of (political) normality. Consequently, the Communist Party could not possibly avoid acting in accordance with the Machiavellian vision, and only falsely presented itself as uniquely principled and uncompromising.[25]

Psychiatry and national trauma

The Institute's teachers emphasized the centrality of trauma and, having equated the functioning and structure of a society with those of an individual, argued that the Serbian national tragedy of defeat and occupation affected young individuals in unforeseeable ways, making them sensitive to ideological and political wandering. In this context, Communist pathology naturally ensued from the enormous psychological shock, humiliation and despair of the Serbian wartime situation, and it was correctable if the effects of the broader social catastrophe were eliminated or at least palliated. Some of those who devoted themselves to making sure that suspected Marxists were brutally dealt with by the German occupation forces, however, spent considerable amounts of time at and around the Institute looking for strategies to 'cure' Communism, now arbitrarily defined as a form of mental pathology to which the young were particularly susceptible. Popovic argued that the inmates should not be held 'guilty for their [treasonous] behaviour at a time when many adults

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failed as well', and that they 'succumbed to the malicious propaganda' at a 'crazy time'.[26] In other words, the general circumstances which the former social elites brought upon the country were to be considered responsible for the inmates' political offences, and not any internal individual leanings and predispositions. In a letter to Ljotic, Popovic cited several examples from which the reader was to conclude that, in a majority of cases, the inmates' attachment to Communism was not particularly deep or strong, but rather a result of a war-related personal and family trauma. One young woman at the Institute reportedly joined the partisans after her father had been killed in the Germans' punitive expedition, and she and her brother had found themselves on the street, not provided for. She allegedly confided in Popovic that she 'had never been left-wing, but did not know how to react' after the father's shooting, and believed that she had few other choices at the time. Another female inmate ended up in the partisan ranks after having been thrown out of the house by her stepmother and Communist father, 'with no family, no resources, no support from the adults'.[27] Popovic then argued that he could achieve miracles in psychological healing and ideological re-education if he approached these young people – maltreated, rejected and continuously intimidated at such a tender age – as a warm, compassionate and understanding ersatz-father to 'accept, hug them, clean their face of its superficial dirt, so that a clean and beautiful Serbian face can shine once again'.[28]

The Institute staff's thinking about such war-related psychological traumas was embedded in a broader social and national context, and exceeded the boundaries of personal dramas. For the collaborationist government, the defeat grew to be the new defining experience of the national psychology, and the anticipated national rebirth centred around the trauma. The entire wartime intellectual project of Ljotic's Zbor was precisely that: making sense of the defeat and of the German brutality, reconciling the discourse of patriotism and national dignity with the reality of defeat, humiliation and mass murder of civilians (in which Ljotic's associates and military formations wholeheartedly participated), and constructing a more acceptable role for Serbian society in the 'New European order'. In this sense, the activities and the overall philosophy of the Institute were simply a continuation of the Zbor leaders' political – and military – collaborationism. The notion of the Serbian national psyche and its core characteristics became a frequent topic of political and ideological discussions, but the national character now had to be recast in an entirely different light: the old myths of rising against foreign enslavement and of uncompromising struggle for liberation would not do any more. Under such novel circumstances, the meaning of national trauma and the historical symbolism of an absolute defeat assumed paramount importance and needed to be renegotiated. Zbor defined its central aim to be this translation of a national humiliation of tragic proportions into an opportunity for transformation and advancement. By reducing the impact of the trauma, Zbor would make the pathological delusions of the Serbian youth redundant and baseless.

In *Zavodski List*, an article appeared on the occasion of the anniversary of the Kosovo battle of 1389, which tackled the issue of the 'historical legacy of a defeat'. Its author, Vojislav Pajevic, a 'former Communist', analysed the historical effect of the defeat of 1389 and the subsequent experience of the Ottoman rule, proclaiming that 'the soul of a nation is similar to the soul of an individual. Just like in the latter, in the former, too, deep and distressing events can create "mental wounds".'[29] In this way, the fate of the entire nation was effectively compared with and related to the fate and future of the Institute's inmates, whose souls had also been scarred by events similar to those that had left the Serbian nation on its knees. The tragedy of such defeat then constituted the core of the collective mentality, but this loss of liberty and traumatic humiliation need not condemn the entire society to cultural irrelevance and languishing: defeat could be an opportunity, 'defeat does not humiliate, but, perhaps even more intensely than victory, it offers immeasurable stimuli and awakens new forces'.[30] Both the inmates and the entire society needed to 'work

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through' the trauma, grasp the opportunities offered by the occupation and Europe's new order, and emerge *healthy* from the chaos and ideological and political contagion of the early war years. As Pajevic concluded, the experience of a traumatic defeat could induce a society to withdraw from the harsh reality and focus on its internal spiritual development 'in the depths of its psyche', and thus its cultural life may 'become even fuller, and at times appear, as an eruption, in its true magnitude and depth'.[31]

In this context, it was not at all surprising that the project of the inmates' re-education was regularly compared with the need for re-building Serbia, as well as with the transformation of the Institute itself and its surrounding lands into a self-sustainable economic complex, its conversion from a political prison to a temporary home and educational/pedagogical institution for several hundred young people, with acceptable living conditions. In an article entitled 'The work of our hands', Pajevic stated that 'this land used not to be like this. We created it with our own hands, we ploughed it, sowed, dug and watered it.'[32] The task of the inmates was, thus, to exert similar efforts and work on themselves, transform themselves from deluded pawns of a malicious, deathly ideology into blossoming, healthy, fruitful individuals, aware of their national responsibility. The key was to approach the 'barren land' with a constructive, warm and dedicated attitude, and success would inevitably ensue. The same metaphor of cultivating the land and saving the fields and woods from disaster and fruitlessness was now invoked to signify the redemption of the entire country; Serbia's citizens were 'our sick brothers', while the source of their illness was again in the woods, in the 'toxic breath of their [the woods'] tenants' – the Communist partisans.[33]

This theory of trauma naturally implied a rather radical psychogenic (or psycho-dynamic) model of human development and mental illness. As another inmate claimed in her article on the 'Basics of pedagogy', 'a man is born as a raw and unformed mass which needs to be processed and worked on so that it can be enabled to participate in the life of a community'.[34] In several other articles in *Zavodski List*, the authors emphasized that the period of youth was one of endless opportunities for shaping and re-shaping one's personality; this process of mental formation and re-formation depended, according to these inmates, entirely on one's experiences. Youth was indeed similar to rebirth: 'The transition from childhood to adolescence is often compared with being born anew because of its significance and difficult stresses which characterize it. Attitudes about life are then shaken, connections with the external world broken, the personality, subject, separates itself from the objective reality.'[35] In other words, the tendency of very young people to succumb to a form of mental pathology such as Communism could be understood in terms of the core psychological characteristics of their age: that they had been exposed to the experience of such an enormous national catastrophe during their formative years might explain their egregious political blunders. The fact that they were so young held the promise that they could be reformed through hard work and the positive influence of the Institute's staff. Their pathology was thus fully the result of a set of highly unfortunate circumstances, and the inmates were consequently portrayed as particularly tragic and impressionable victims of historical events and of the incapacity of their elders – the family or the social elites – to help them deal with that ordeal more constructively.

Violence and repression: approaching the end

According to former internees' testimonies as well as the Institute's own reports, the methods used became increasingly brutal over time. The Institute's measures became based on fear, threats, coercion and a harsh disciplinary policy – precisely what Popovic initially argued vehemently against. The rhetoric of paternal love and the relationship of mutual trust with the inmates could not possibly hold much promise to begin with, given the main premise upon which the Institute had been

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founded: the threat that, if the inmates proved to be incorrigible, they would need to be returned to the Banjica concentration camp. There, their chances of survival were radically diminished. When Popovic and the other teachers noticed the inmates' resistance and their constant efforts to establish a connection with the local Communist Party cell, they resorted to ever harsher measures and threatened the internees with German retaliations or the Special Police's brutality.

As the situation turned ever more precarious for the collaborationist authorities, the intensification of the Institute's repressive tendencies was palpable. As one female internee later put it:

> At first, the Institute's leadership tried to create a special atmosphere, mainly through amateur theatre performances, to place everything on a different footing [than it was in the Special Police prisons] but after they saw that we remained politically active and prepared escapes, then they introduced a regime that grew stricter and stricter over time.[36]

Under such circumstances, every interaction proved to be suspicious, and gatherings in groups of three or more were forbidden. Popovic or one of the other teachers would regularly interrogate – and occasionally beat – those who defied this rule. On several occasions, the Special Police agents joined Popovic in beating and interrogating the most recalcitrant or suspicious inmates. Towards the end of the war, Popovic himself confirmed, in a letter to the Ministry of Education, that the atmosphere was one of 'arrests, interrogation, punishments'.[37]

The internees engaged in a variety of forms of resistance, which ranged from minor infractions of the dress code to planning putsches and mass escapes. While many young Communists incarcerated in Smederevska Palanka tried not to attract too much attention by either disobeying or complying too conspicuously, apparently several inmates openly stood by their former ideological views and used every opportunity to make it clear to the Institute's leadership that the re-educational mission was bound to fail. According to inmate Savo Brkovic's reminiscences, a group of particularly active Communist Party members frequently entered discussions following guest lecturers' talks, and openly countered the lecturers' or the teachers' theses, defending a Marxist point of view or emphasizing fallacies and loopholes in the speakers' theoretical frameworks. Brkovic remembered a particularly vivid incident, when inmate Mihajlo Radic – 'theoretically fairly strong, who could challenge any of those lecturers of ours' – argued with Najdanovic, one of the speakers and Ljotic's close associate, and presented arguments so strongly and skilfully that the lecturer was clearly unable to respond and ended the discussion.[38] The inmates organized their own secret political meetings, where they would use the assigned Marxist literature on the history of the USSR and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), and analyse it from the Communist viewpoint; these meetings were led by the oldest and most educated or experienced Party members from among the inmates, and they served as a fairly powerful ideological counterpoint to the Institute's efforts.

But the internees also engaged in more serious forms of resistance. They continuously sought to remain connected with the outside partisan groups through various individuals in the town of Smederevska Palanka, to coordinate their activities with the partisans, to receive instructions from the Party and to organize escapes from the Institute for all those who wanted to re-join the resistance ranks. The first serious mass escape attempt occurred in April 1943, when a group of over 15 male inmates planned to seize the guards' weapons, arrest the Institute's staff, execute Popovic and join the Kosmaj partisan unit. The preparations for this putsch and escape attempt failed when information about it was leaked to the Institute's leadership; as a result, very few escaped, one inmate was shot immediately and Popovic sent 13 others to the Banjica concentration camp.[39] A group of female inmates managed to flee in November 1943, but most of them were re-arrested in the course of the following week and brought back to the Institute, where they were interrogated,

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beaten and tortured by the Special Police; their connections in the Party cells in both Belgrade and Smederevska Palanka were then also discovered and they were incarcerated in Banjica.[40] Finally, in 1944 there were three more mass escapes, in June, August and September. In preparation for these, some of the inmates even received weapons from the local Communist Party. On at least one occasion, a group of the guards ran away as well (Borkovic, 1966: 109–10)

By the end of 1943, the situation at the Institute was slowly spinning out of control, and in January 1944 the leadership decided to appoint a disciplinarian member of staff and 'implement a form of military regime due to the deteriorating discipline'.[41] In response to the incidents described above, the Institute's leaders also decided to isolate those whom they found the most unflinching in their dedication to the Party and therefore the most dangerous for the general discipline. This was to be achieved by putting these problematic internees in a separate barrack, named the 'Isolation Unit' (*Izolator*), where they lived in challenging physical and hygienic conditions, were prevented from participating in the Institute's regular educational and extra-curricular activities, and were condemned to the hardest manual labour in all weather conditions. A sentence to the Isolation Unit was in fact the first step to being sent back to the Banjica concentration camp; to regain their former status, the isolated inmates had to recant publicly, which they refused to do.[42] In order to determine which inmates should be sent to the Isolation Unit, the leadership decided to involve the Institute's entire population, and set up an opinion poll. All the internees had to name colleagues who they thought did not deserve the privileges of the Institute's regular inmates, and should instead be placed in punitive isolation. After the poll's results were made public, the Institute's leadership made some corrections, adding several names to the list. This, according to the former inmates' post-war testimonies, was merely another aspect of Popovic's strategy to divide the internees, and undermine their solidarity and camaraderie by creating an illusion that the inmates also participated in the Institute's decision-making on equal terms. While there were many who wrote up long lists of candidates for the Isolation Unit, a significant number reportedly refused to take part in the poll, or returned blank papers.[43]

Achievements and failures

It is difficult to ascertain how successful the Institute eventually was in its mission of 're-educating' the young Communists of Serbia. The post-war interviewees generally denied the Institute any meaningful success, and insisted that most inmates remained loyal to the Party line. However, even they admitted that, after the chaos of the war, personal tragedies, difficulties of partisan life and ultimately the torture and brutality endured at hands of police, some internees were quite likely to become attached to the Institute's leadership, whose initially warm, friendly and seemingly understanding approach contrasted strongly with the preceding experiences of many inmates.[44] Clearly, a significant number of people decided to obey the Institute's rules, take part in various cultural extra-curricular activities, and write articles for *Zavodski List* (Borkovic, 1966: 115). A much smaller group agreed to proclaim their ideological transformation more straightforwardly – by giving lectures, becoming Institute teachers and pedagogues in their own right, convincing other inmates to 'get re-educated' as well, and finally by reporting to the leadership some inmates' suspicious activities or pro-Communist statements.

At the end of their term at the Institute (usually six months to a year), the inmates were released, or returned to Banjica or had their stay at the Institute extended by way of punishment. After the release, some inmates joined Ljotic's Volunteers, Nedic's Serbian State Guard or even Mihajlovic's Chetniks, or were conscripted for a set period of time to the Nedic government's compulsory National Service (Borkovic, 1966: 112). Out of 1270 inmates who were kept at the

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Institute during its two-year existence, only 104 voluntarily joined one of the collaborationist anti-Communist organizations.[45]

Many others, though, stayed at home or continued going to high schools and gymnasiums. Popovic, his wife and some of the other teachers kept in touch, through letters and postcards, with most of their former inmates, keeping track of their activities, plans and whereabouts after release, and demanding responses to their enquiries. Many inmates did reply, or even initiate written correspondence with Popovic and his wife, and some regularly returned to the Institute to meet their former teachers and friends, to get various permissions, recommendations and passes, as well as to discuss their future or take part in celebrations and anniversaries. For some of the 're-educated' ones, the Institute's personnel most probably became some sort of parental guidance figures, and in some of the letters, these former internees referred to the Institute leadership as their true family and home. Indeed, at times, the purpose of the warm approach seemed to have been achieved: some inmates confirmed that they were impressed and ultimately won over to the side of the Institute's leadership when they realized that people, who – according to the CPY's propaganda – were supposed to be their mortal enemies, could assume such a compassionate attitude. Kuburovic (1955) reported the words of one inmate, Vera Cenic, to Popovic when she was being released: 'I am leaving full of doubts about that which I had been ready to sacrifice and give my life for yesterday. To you and your wife, as well as to the other teachers, I have to pay tribute because, as our [ideological] opponents, you have been our true friends and protectors' (Kuburovic, 1955). Gordana Jakovljevic, who was temporarily released from the Institute to hospital when she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, wrote to Popovic asking him to expedite her return to Smederevska Palanka. Gordana complained bitterly about her father, 'a man who could be considered of Jewish origin by those who did not know him because he is only concerned about his narrow personal interests, and ready to discard the truth and honesty'. Her father reportedly kept attempting to manipulate her physicians and extend her hospitalization so that she would not be sent back to the Institute; Gordana, according to her letter, on the other hand, yearned to return – she claimed to have too much respect and gratitude for what the Institute's leadership did for her in her most difficult moments. This inmate thus proclaimed her loyalty to the Institute and Popovic over her own parents. At the end of her letter, she added: 'I can't wait to return and tell you everything, because all cannot be conveyed in letters. I must admit I very much wish to talk honestly with an honest man finally, I will tell you the whole truth when I am back.'[46] Another inmate referred to her time at the Institute as the 'most pleasant moments of [her] life'.[47] Inmate Zatezic, who joined Ljotic's Volunteers following his release, sent regular reports of his military duties, and shared his delight at having found the right side and freed himself of the delusion that the Communists were to bring about liberation and prosperity. Zatezic also reported on the battles in which he was involved, extremely enthusiastic to have been given the opportunity to shoot at the foremost enemies of Serbiandom – the Ustasha and the Communists.[48]

However, one cannot escape the impression that these were individual cases which could hardly be used to paint a general picture of the Institute's success and popularity. The most convincing proof of the overall failure of its mission was the breakdown of discipline, especially in the second half of its term, and the tightening of the punitive regime. This development and the Institute leadership's increasing tendency to resort back to police measures substantiated the former inmates' post-war claims that an influential core of staunch Party supporters had indeed existed who refused even to seem to be affected by a variety of re-education strategies. The Isolation Unit, where the most problematic and subversive internees were eventually placed, thus predictably became an 'ideological course' in its own right, where the inmates used their free time to discuss political and ideological issues previously raised in the Institute's classes. At the same time, the Communist Party of Palanka kept regular contacts with the inmates, sending them political literature, letters,

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instructions and even weapons, and attempting to coordinate its activity with those incarcerated at the Institute. Finally, many of those sentenced to a term at the Institute had already known each other, from partisan resistance divisions in the woods or underground work in urban areas, or alternatively from the Banjica concentration camp where they had shared some of the worst and most torturous experiences of their lives. These bonds and collectives were hard to break, and the Institute personnel's gradual loss of patience in the treatment of some of the inmates testified to this.

The Institute was officially disbanded in October 1944 in the midst of chaos and the withdrawal of the German units and the collaborationist government through Austria. All the inmates were released, and some of the staff joined the Volunteers or managed to escape with the Nedic government. Milovan Popovic joined Mihajlovic's Chetniks, and died while fighting (Nikolova, 2010: 44; Stefanovic, 1984: 210–11).

After the end of World War II in Eastern Europe, state psychiatrists developed a simple and heroic narrative of their profession's linear development, according to which the socio-political revolutions in the aftermath of 1945 finally liberated bourgeois and Fascist psychiatry from the reactionary strains of the degenerative biomedical model of mental illness, and pushed it in a more empathetic and progressive direction, increasing its awareness of pathological effects of the socio-economic, psychogenic and environmental. Moreover, the post-war therapeutic turn fitted in well with some of the core tenets of Marxism. But it was much more complex than the official narrative would indicate, and took much longer in the making. When Yugoslavia's Communist psychiatrists argued that a socio-economic transformation and psychological healing could free the Yugoslav society of its mental woes, they sounded much like the head of Ljotic's Institute. The model of the Institute's application of social psychiatry to erasing the 'national trauma' would be very important for conceptualizing socialist-era psychiatry: Yugoslav psychiatry would strive to blend in with the broader political and socio-economic reforms in an attempt to affect positively the pathological marks that social dislocations and political oppression left on the national mind. Socialist psychiatry scorned the exclusively biological framework of its pre-war predecessor as reactionary, but it was the collaborationist regime's conception of psychiatry that had first introduced the importance of the social context and psychological traumatization well before the revolutionary year of 1945.

Notes

1. In recent years, a number of books, articles and edited volumes have appeared, addressing the involvement of medical and scientific professions in Eastern and Central Europe in political projects such as state modernization, nation-building and improving the (mental and physical) health of the nation. These studies examined the supreme importance of eugenics and racial theories for such involvement, and showed that medical and social science professions in the region tended to embrace a number of ideas regarding 'racial hygiene' and biological fitness, and integrate them into their theories and practices (Bucur, 2002; Lafferton, 2007; Turda, 2009; Turda and Weindling, 2007; Yeomans, 2010). However, my article explores the opposite trend: an extremely right-wing group's mission to cure the nation's 'ailments' by adopting and adapting a set of ideas that moved away from the biomedical model and theories of social/national degeneration.
2. Archive of Yugoslavia, Fond 110, f-810, [Indictment against Milovan Popovic], 1.
3. Archive of Yugoslavia, Fond 110, f-801, Podaci o zlocinima okupatora i njihovih pomagaca – Milovan Popovic [indictment against Milovan Popovic], 1–4.
4. For a very detailed account of the leading role of the Special Police in anti-Communist activities in occupied Serbia and its relationship with the Nedic government and the Gestapo, see Bozovic, 2003.
5. Bozic R, Mi treba iz praha I pepela da dizemo nasu napacenu otadzbinu [We need to resurrect our suffering fatherland from the ashes]. *Zavodski List*, 20 Oct. 1943, 13–14: 1.
6. On Nedic's educational reform and its results, see: Borkovic, 1979b: 72–94; Stefanovic, 1984: 211–22.

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7. Borkovic argues that the anti-Communist military struggle was the central goal of the Nedic government and its armed formations, and aggressive anti-Communism certainly constituted a core element of the government's ideological pronouncements. According to Borkovic, all cabinet changes throughout the occupation years were aimed at making the government more efficient in aiding the Germans eradicate the Communist resistance movement in Serbia (Borkovic, 1979a: 146). In one of his many exhortations to the 'Serbian people', published in the Belgrade weekly *Ponedeljak*, Nedic called for popular violence against Communists and urged Serbian peasants to sacrifice themselves in order to eliminate Communism: 'rise up, defend your homes from Communist plunderers, bandits and renegades from God and the authorities, family and society, church and religion. Know that this is a sacred struggle for defending Serbia and Serbiandom. With or without weapons, strike and slay the red bandits whenever you catch them, because that is the only way to salvation. Even if you fall in the course of that struggle, you will save your home and your children, the Serbian nation.' (*Ponedeljak*, 13 Oct. 1941).
8. For a more thorough analysis of the political role and ambitions of Yugoslav psychiatry in the twentieth century, see my unpublished dissertation 'Psychiatry at war: psychiatric culture and political ideology in Yugoslavia under the Nazi occupation', Columbia University, 2012.
9. Archive of Serbia, Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, 3/3-1, 50, 1.
10. Ibid., 3.
11. Military Archive Serbia, Vaspitni Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, br. reg. 1-18, f. 2, k. 155, p. 34.
12. Archive of Yugoslavia, Zemaljska komisija za utvrdjivanje ratnih zlocina 1943–1944, F-32, "Plan i program rada", 887, 1.
13. *Zavodski List* was supposed to be a project run entirely by the inmates, and to involve as many writers, contributors and editors from the ranks of former enemies of the Nedic state as possible, although every issue had to get the approval of the teacher in charge of supervising the newspaper. It was only published from May to November 1943, but Popovic had high hopes for the paper, and planned to have it distributed outside the Institute, especially to high-school and university students, and therefore framed it as yet another expression of the Nedic government's educational reform, the Institute's original contribution to the raising of new generations ready to be employed in the service of building New Serbia in New Europe. For that reason, in ideological terms *Zavodski List* never directly related itself to either Germany or National Socialism; politically, it chiefly focused on Serbia's internal situation, the patriotism of its wartime leaders, and on reinterpreting the Serbian past in order to demonstrate a continuity between its heroic historical figures on the one hand, and Nedic's and Ljotic's project on the other. It aimed to draw the outlines of the new Serbia to be born after the end of the war. This was another reason why it could not be overtly fascistic or even excessively ideological; it included lengthy sections on art, literary criticism and book reviews, essays in philosophy and psychology which were at times only tangentially or indirectly related to the Institute's project or the context of the occupation. In addition, the inmates were encouraged to publish their original artwork, mainly poems and short fictional stories. In the course of creating and developing the Institute's newspaper, very many inmates did indeed collaborate in its preparation and contribute their work at least occasionally; this did not mean, however, that all of them were automatically 're-educated'. In fact, neither the Institute staff nor they themselves necessarily considered collaboration to be a sign of their siding with Popovic's political project and rejection of their leftist views. Instead, the inmates' participation shaped the character of the newspaper to a significant extent, and apparently at times blunted the sharpness of its intended ideological message (Krstic, 1981: 138–9).
14. Milinkovic S, Razmisljanje [Rumination]. *Zavodski List*, 20 Aug. 1943, 9: 1–2.
15. City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Vesna Butjer, Dragan Dramicanin, Jelica Nedic and Anica Paskaljevic [former inmates], 8 Jan. 1953, p. 63; the teachers claimed that they only demanded honesty and promised no repercussions to those students who disagreed with the Institute's politics and proffered their continued allegiance to the leftist ideas. However, many former inmates confirmed that 'wrong' answers regularly led to punishments and a harsher treatment, possibly a return to the Banjica concentration camp; see also Stefanovic, 1984: 204–5.
16. Archive of Serbia, Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, 37/5-1, 50.

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17. Military Archive Serbia, Vaspitni Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, br. reg. 1-14, f. 3, knj. 155, 26.
18. Military Archive Serbia, Vaspitni Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, br. reg. 9-37, f. 2, knj. 155, 63-64, and br. reg. 9-36, f. 2, knj. 155, 61.
19. Ibid., 32-63.
20. Archive of Yugoslavia, Fond 110, f-765/VIII, 8; also Stefanovic, 1984: 204; Borkovic, 1966: 102.
21. City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Jelena Djordjevic, Dusan Vucinic, Vesna Butjer, Anica Paskaljevic, Dragan Ivanovic and Predrag Dramicanin, 19 June 1952, p. 17. These testimonies were given to the City Archive of Belgrade in the course of the 1950s and 1960s by some of the staunchest wartime Communist Party members and partisans formerly incarcerated in Smederevska Palanka. For a critical review of the process of collecting such post-war testimonies from the Banjica camp survivors, see Byford, 2010.
22. Archive of Serbia, Zavod u SmederevskojPalanci, 3/3-1, 50, 3.
23. Interviews [see Note 21], p. 6.
24. City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Vesna Butjer, Kornelija Ancukic, Predrag Dramicanin and Dragoslav Ivanovic, 15 Jan. 1953, 75–76.
25. Interviews [see Note 21], p. 20.
26. Archive of Serbia, Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, 11/7-1, f. 50, 1.
27. Ibid., 3-4.
28. Popovic M, Ova omladina ce se oduziti svojoj otadzbini casno I posteno [This youth will repay its debt to the fatherland honourably and honestly]. *Zavodski list*, 20 Oct. 1943, 6.
29. Pajevic V, Istorijsko nasledje jednog poraza [Historical heritage of a defeat]. *Zavodski List*, 28 June 1943, 4: 1.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 3.
33. Nikolic R, Srbija ceka na nas [Serbia is waiting for us]. *Zavodski list*, 10 Aug. 1943, 8: 1.
34. Jovicic J, Osnov vaspitanja [The basis of upbringing]. *Zavodski list*, 10 July 1943, 5: 1.
35. Markovic M, Omladinac I knjizevnost [Youth and literature]. *Zavodski List*, 20 July 1943, 6: 5.
36. City Archive Belgrade, Interview with Milan Josimovic, Anka Paskaljevic, Dragoljub Jevtovic, Vesna Butjer and Predrag Dramicanin, 29 May 1952, 22.
37. Archive of Yugoslavia, F-110, file 801, Milovan Popovic, 2.
38. City Archive Belgrade, Interview with Savo Brkovic, [undated], p. 11 Moreover, if discussions in political classes did not go as planned and if the inmates failed to agree with the teachers' interpretations, the classes would sometimes be discontinued and the inmates sent to do hard physical labour instead: 'for a period of time, these classes were discontinued altogether because the leadership started to doubt their ultimate success.' (City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Vesna Butjer, Dragan Dramicanin, Jelica Nedic and Anica Paskaljevic, 8 Jan. 1953, 63).
39. Stefanovic, 1984: 208; Archive of Yugoslavia, Fond 110, f-801, akt, str. Pov. br. 47; Borkovic, 1966: 108.
40. City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Mihailo Cagic, Vera Cenic, Anica Paskaljevic, Kornelija Ankucic, Vesna Butjer, Divna Mirkovic, Jelica Nedic, Zora Popovic, Ljuba Stamenkovic, Milena Radovanovic, 25 Dec. 1952, 57–59.
41. Archive of Yugoslavia, Fond 110, f-801, 3.
42. City Archive Belgrade, Interviews with Predrag Dramicanin, Vesna Butjer, Anica Paskaljevic, Steva Drndarevic, Dragoljub Jevtovic, Dragoslav Ivanovic, 10 July 1952, 40.
43. Military Archive Serbia, Vaspitni Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, br. reg. 5-28, f. 2, knj. 155, 66; Interviews [see Note 24], p. 26.
44. Interviews [see Note 42], p. 2.
45. Archive of Serbia, Drzavna Komisija za utvrdjivanje zlocina, k. 31, br. 2798
46. Military Archive Serbia, Vaspitni Zavod u Smederevskoj Palanci, knj. 50, 16/7-1
47. Ibid., knj. 50, 21/6-2.
48. Ibid., knj. 50, 49/3-1.

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